



75 Years

GRACE CHURCH AND THE
INCARNATION

(ST. GEORGE'S CHAPEL, VENANGO)

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ST. GEORGE'S CHAPEL, VENANGO

(ABOUT 1904)

During the Fall of 1886, the Reverend J. DeWolf Perry, D. D., Dean of the Convocation of Germantown and John Totty, an English layman interested in missionary work, made plans for the establishment of a mission in Venango Village.

"Protestant Episcopal Sunday School and Public Service will be held on Sundays under the direction of 'The Convocation of Germantown' in the building at the corner of Victoria and Bath Streets" reads a faded yellow-edged handbill. It further mentions plans to build a chapel in the neighborhood, "but for the present, the building above named (known as Hurricane Hall) will be used to gather a Sunday School and congregation". Hurricane Hall was used by the community each week as a place to hold public dances, boxing matches, political rallies and other social activities. The building itself belonged to Thomas Houghney. Records show rent of four dollars per month, due on the 28th of each month was paid for the use of the hall. Thomas Kenney served as janitor and was paid a salary of five dollars each month for his services.

By 1888 Hurricane Hall was impracticable as a meeting place. Through the intercession of Mr. Totty and Dean Perry, Mr. W. W. Frazier, then Treasurer of the Episcopal Hospital and an executive of the Franklin Sugar Refining Company, donated the money to purchase a lot 91 x 125 feet located

at Edgemont and Venango Streets, from Mr. Walter Dilkes. A frame building to accommodate 150 people was erected at the approximate cost of \$1,700. A bell was also purchased for \$106. The pipe organ, which required hand pumping, was a gift of Bouness Briggs of the Wilmington and Northern Railroad. Mr. William Brown donated his services as sexton.

Attendance had grown steadily at the little Sunday School which the Tottys had organized in January of 1887. An article printed in February of that year in The Church, requested donations of "surplus Sunday School papers, library books, discarded furniture and particularly a reading desk and a large bible". About 36 pupils and five teachers met together each Sunday afternoon.

The Philadelphia Public Ledger for Saturday, November 24, 1888 reads "St. George's Chapel, at Venango and Edgemont Streets above Port Richmond which was lately erected under the Convocation of Germantown is to be opened tomorrow. There will be Sunday School at 2:30 P.M. and a service at 7:30 P.M. at which the preacher will be the Rev'd. J. DeWolf Perry, Dean of the Convocation of Germantown and Rector of Calvary Church Germantown". This was the first service held in the new structure located at the corner of two cobblestone streets surrounded by empty fields.

Mr. and Mrs. Totty remained until 1900, during which time Mr. Totty had been made Deacon. The congregation grew in number; 175 were baptized and approximately 100 confirmed. In Mr. Totty's last report, April 1900, there were 38 families numbering 77 communicants with an average attendance at services of approximately 50 each week. Collections averaged about four dollars a Sunday.

Few homes had been built in the area during the twelve years since the Chapel had been opened. Many workmen had moved to other communities when the City of Philadelphia transferred the gas works to a private corporation under which the work was harder, and the pay less. Discouraged and in poor health, the Rev. Mr. Totty and his wife, Maria, returned to England, their native land.

From July 1900 to September of the same year, Mr. Charles Tuke, a student at the Divinity School took charge of the Chapel. (The Rev. Mr. Tuke, until his death recently was former Rector of St. John the Evangelist, Lansdowne, Pa.) followed by Mr. Alfred A. Gilman, also a student, who later became Suffragan Bishop of Hankow, China. In June 1901 Mr. Waldemar Jansen (now Rector Emeritus, Trinity, Oxford) replaced Mr. Gilman as student in charge.

By this time the congregation had diminished and the Convocation was thinking of abandoning the mission. Bishop Whitaker was not in favor. He persuaded the Convocation

to contribute \$800 to pay a missionary for an additional year as an experiment. The Rev. A. J. Arkin, then just graduated from The Philadelphia Divinity School was appointed to the mission. On Sunday morning, November 24, 1901, he preached his first sermon to eleven people, six of whom comprised the family of Mr. John Buckley, sexton. Under Mr. Arkin's leadership attendance once again increased until the Chapel was not large enough to accommodate the people and the various groups which were meeting on a regular basis.

Mr. Arkin organized a Mother's Meeting, a Girl's Friendly Society and a Young Men's Club. A reed organ had also been donated to replace the pump organ in use since the Chapel had been built. Miss E. T. Taylor a student at the Deaconess House volunteered to play it and also to organize a choir.

Mr. Arkin's first confirmation class consisted of 23 men and women which he presented to the Rt. Rev. Leighton Coleman, Bishop of Delaware, officiating in the absence of Bishop Whitaker who was recuperating from an illness.

On July 1, 1902, ground was broken for an extension of the Chapel and the addition of a basement for the Sunday School and a meeting room for the various groups. A chancel was added, the ceiling removed and the roof wainscoated on the inside. The chancel and transept windows were a gift of St. Martin's-in-the-Field, Chestnut Hill. The cornerstone was laid July 22, and Bishop Whitaker dedicated the new rooms on December 2.

By 1905 Mr. Arkin felt the work of the Chapel should be continued in a different location, close to a more populous area, preferably in the Richmond section. He presented his case to the Convocation. The Rev. J. Andrew Harris, Rector of St. Paul's, Chestnut Hill invited Mr. Arkin to speak to his congregation. The people of St. Paul's responded with a plate offering of \$1,300 towards a building fund. Mr. Arthur E. Newbold, a member of St. Paul's, took particular interest in the project. As a result of discussions with the Bishop Coadjutor, Mackay Smith, then in charge of Diocesan missions, a lot was purchased on E. Indiana Ave. between Almond and Livingston Streets for the erection of St. George's Church.

The Chapel in Venango was not closed entirely. Mr. Arkin persuaded Miss Ethel Ott of Doylestown to take charge of a kindergarten which was to meet in the basement of the Chapel. The venture proved to be successful. For more than fifteen years Miss Ott taught many of the small children of the neighborhood. Miss Katherine C. Coulter, a school teacher, continued the Sunday School which also began to increase in pupils. Mr. Arkin interested two men who were active in the Brotherhood of St. Andrew of St. Matthew's Church, Franksville, 18th and Girard Ave. in conducting services at the Chapel each Sunday until Mr. Paul S. Atkins was appointed Lay Reader in Charge. Mr. Arkin continued to visit each month for Communion. Mr. Barnes later moved to Venango and took a more active part in the church by becoming Treasurer of the

Vestry, organist and choirmaster. Mr. George Sladen, also an active member of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, succeeded Mr. Atkins in May 1913 and served until February 1922.

Bishop Garland began to feel that the work of the Chapel had grown to proportions requiring the services of a full time clergyman. He appointed the Rev. Alexander J. Kilpatrick as Vicar of the mission in the Fall of 1922. Within a short time the Rev. Mr. Kilpatrick received a call to a parish.

In December 1924, the Rev. Arnold Hord, formerly Rector of St. Michael's Germantown, became Vicar of St. George's. Although he possessed a physical handicap, (he had been unable to speak because of a throat defect) he worked hard and soon the mission increased in membership to about 280. He also regained the use of his voice which also encouraged him. The City of Philadelphia physically opened Venango Street, west of the Chapel and as a result, more homes were constructed and the population of Venango increased. Once again the building was not sufficient to accommodate the people and the activities of the mission. In March, 1928, the Rt. Rev. Thomas J. Garland laid the cornerstone of what was to be the first unit of the parish house. Unfortunately, the Rev. Mr. Hord was forced to resign in 1935 due to ill health.

In 1936, upon the recommendation of Dean Stockman, Bishop Taitt appointed the Rev. Leonard Sachs to succeed Mr. Hord. Mr. Sachs had been an active member of the mission since

childhood. Two years later, in 1938, he accepted a call to Advent Church, Hatboro, the church he still serves as Rector.

It was at this time that Dean Stockman requested a Lay Missionary, Mr. E. Edgerton Proffitt to serve the mission and conduct services. Mr. Proffitt conceived the idea of a chapel for the children while serving at St. George's. He was also associated with the Seamen's Church Institute and with the help of the sailors who came into the Port of Philadelphia who stayed at the Institute, work began on chapel. An Italian Priest designed and painted a triptych. Mr. Proffitt's friends and members of the mission readily contributed both time and memorials to complete the room. A service of dedication was conducted by the Rt. Rev. Oliver J. Hart on December 28, 1945 for the Memorial Children's Chapel of the Holy Innocents. Our primary class still meets in the children's chapel each Sunday.

During the years of World War II, St. George's was served by the Rev. Philip Broburg, later Rector of St. Bartholomew's Wissington and then by the Rev. Morris W. Derr and Christopher Wyld, a Lay Missionary.

The year 1946 brought a major change to the life of St. George's Chapel, Venango. The merged parish of Grace Church and the Incarnation was occupying a large imposing edifice located at the corner of Broad and Jefferson Streets. The neighborhood had once belonged to a wealthy class who built elaborate town houses and a church to match. Constructed in 1855 and named The Church of the Incarnation, it was the first

church on North Broad Street. Over the years the neighborhood changed; the wealthy moved away and sold their homes to real estate agents. These men converted the homes to apartments and rented them to several families who cared little about themselves or their dwellings. The once-large congregation dwindled to a handful. This story repeated itself in the case of another once prominent Episcopal Church.

Grace Church, also a large and beautiful structure, founded in 1826 stood at the corner of 12th and Cherry Streets. As center city grew, the church no longer served the needs of its area, now a business district. The congregation moved to 41st and Girard Streets in 1909 where a chapel had been maintained. Both the neighborhood and the membership of Grace Church soon declined. In 1942 a union of the two churches took place -- Grace Church with the Church of the Incarnation. The Rev. John K. Shryock, who had been Rector of Grace Church since 1928, became Rector of the merged parish of Grace Church and the Incarnation. Even with the union of the two congregations, communicant strength was not enough to justify continued use of the large structure. Many of the original members of both churches had moved or died. By 1946 Dr. Shryock knew something had to be done. As Dean of the North Philadelphia Convocation, he had been acquainted with St. George's Chapel and with the community in which it was located. He saw possibilities for growth and development. Negotiations among the vestries of both churches, Dr. Shryock and Bishop Hart took place. Agreement was reached merging Grace Church and the Incarnation with St. George's Chapel, the new

parish taking the name of the former, and making use of as many of the costly and beautiful memorials that had belonged to both of the once large and prosperous churches as was possible. The memorials included the pulpit, reredos, baptismal font, pews, Communion vessels and several stained glass windows. Most of the furnishings received are still in use today.

Bishop Remmington officiated at a service celebrating the union on June 30, 1946. A smooth assimilation of both congregations was accomplished. A new warmth and spirit developed with the people from Grace Church and the Incarnation taking an active interest in the activities of their "new" church. Dr. Shryock continued as Rector, but resigned as Dean of the North Philadelphia Convocation in order to devote his full time to his people. Dr. Shryock's untimely death in December 1952 was a great loss to the new parish.

The vacant land and farms which for many years had surrounded the Chapel had changed hands. Several large trucking companies moved into the neighborhood filling the land with large trucks and trailers. Other types of small companies bought land until the area could no longer be called residential.

The Rev. Alfred Redding began his duties as Rector in October 1953, and remained until May 1958 when he became Assistant Rector of St. Paul's Church in Baltimore, Maryland.

The Rev. Robert C. S. Deacon, formerly assistant at Trinity Church, Swarthmore, agreed to accept the Rectorship in April 1958. The

Deacons rented a house on Weymouth Street. After a few months of traveling back and forth for services and the various weekday activities which required his attendance, Mr. Deacon felt he could serve the people better if he could live in the area. After inspecting and evaluating the available properties in the neighborhood, the Vestry purchased a property at 3631 E. Thompson Street to use as a rectory. In September 1959 the Deacons were able to occupy the new residence. The Rev. Mr. Deacon accepted the Rectorship of Zion Church , Broad and Wyoming in April 1962.

Until the vacancy could be filled the Rev. Henry P. Prentiss a retired clergyman of the Diocese ministered to the congregation. Meanwhile, the Vestry called Charles A. Hulet, then a student at the Virginia Theological Seminary as Deacon-in-Charge upon his graduation and ordination. He held his first service on July 22 with a congregation of 58. On December 21st, 1962, Bishop Hart ordained Mr. Hulet and two other Deacons to the Priesthood, marking the first such service ever to be held in the Chapel.

This is a short summary of the 75 years since a little chapel was built to serve the spiritual needs of the small community of truck farms with the gas works, a paper mill and a few other small industries comprising the section of the city named Venango Village.

Many events and many more people than I have been able to mention in these few pages have held an important place in the life

of our church. A great number of original records have been lost and little has ever been recorded about Grace Church and the Incarnation (St. George's Chapel, Venango), so I have had to rely primarily on the memories and pleasant recollections of many people; and of the events in their lives that have a connection with the little church building located at the northwest corner of Edgemont and Venango Streets.

L.Hulet
November 1963

1888-	The Rev. John Totty	
1900	(Lay Reader and Deacon)	
July 1900-	Mr. Charles E. Tuke	
Sept. 1900	(Divinity Student)	
Oct. 1900-	Mr. Alfred A. Gilman	
June 1901	(Divinity Student)	
June 1901-	Mr. Waldemar Jansen	
Nov. 1901	(Divinity Student)	
Nov. 1901-	The Rev. A. J. Arkin	
1905-	Work of St. George's Chapel transferred to St. George's, Richmond)	
1905-	Mr. Ware, Mr. Charles Barnes,	
1912	(Missionaries of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew)	
	Mr. Paul Atkins (Lay Reader in Charge)	
May 1912-	Mr. George Sladen (Lay Missionary,	
Feb. 1922	Brotherhood of St. Andrew)	
Sept. 1922-	The Rev. Alexander J. Kilpatrick	
Sept. 1924		
Oct. 1924-	The Rev. Arnold Hord	
1935		
June 1935-	The Rev. Leonard Sachs	
Oct. 1937		
Oct. 1937-	Mr. E. Edgerton Proffitt	
Dec. 1941	(Lay Missionary)	
Aug. 1941-	The Rev. Philip Broburg	
Sept. 1942		
Dec. 1942-	The Rev. Morris W. Derr	
June 1943		
1943-	Mr. Christopher Wyld	
1946	(Lay Missionary)	
1946		Merger with Grace Church and the Incarnation
1946-		The Rev. John K. Shryock
Dec. 1952		
Oct. 1953-		The Rev. Alfred Redding
May 1958		
Aug. 1958-		The Rev. Robert C. S. Deacon
April 1962		
May 1962-		The Rev. Henry P. Prentiss
July 1962		
Present		The Rev. Charles A. Hulet

During periods when the Chapel was without a clergyman in residence it was served by many priests from various churches in the Diocese who came to administer the Sacraments to the people.